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GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE,
ANTICOSTI.

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The steps which are now being taken towards the construction of an Intercolonial Railroad in British America, give unusual value to any information respecting the little-known tract of country through which the contemplated road will pass, as well as to the great Gulf of St. Lawrence, along or near which this intercolonial trunk-line will have its course. The following article refers principally to a little-known but most valuable Island in the Gulf, which may one day become the seat of a numerous maritime population, whose industry will have a great influence upon the future prosperity of Canada and the other British North American Provinces.

Anticosti was first discovered by Cartier, in 1534, and called by him in his second voyage "Assomption;" by the pilot, Jearz Alphonse, in 1542, "Ascension Isle;" and by the Indians, "Natiscotec," which the French transformed into "Anticosti."

This fine Island is 122 miles long, 30 broad, and 270 miles in circumference, and contains nearly 2,000,000 acres of land. Its nearest point is about 450 miles below Quebec. The limestone rocks on the coast are covered with a thick and often impenetrable forest of dwarf spruce, with gnarled branches, so twisted and matted together that a man may walk for a considerable distance on their summits.† In the interior some fine timber exists, consisting of birch, a little pine and spruce.‡ The streams which descend to the coast abound with trout and salmon in the summer season. Seals frequent the flat limestone rocks in vast numbers. Mackerel in immense shoals congregate around all parts of the

* The Natiscotec River empties into the Gulf on the north side of the Island.

† Bayfield.

‡ On the authority of Pursh, the pond pine (*pinus serotina*) is found at Anticosti. This botanist visited the island in 1817. As this pine is a southern species, it having established itself on that northern island is a singular circumstance. On the same occasion Pursh brought back, in the shape of dried specimens as well as in the living state, many plants which seem peculiar to the island.—Hon. W. Sheppard, on the Distribution of the Conifera in Canada.

coast. Bears are very numerous, foxes and martins abundant ; otters and a few mice complete the known list of quadrupeds. Neither snakes, toads nor frogs are known to exist on this desolate Isle.

Unfortunately, there are no good natural harbours on Anticosti ; and in consequence of very extensive reefs of flat limestone rock, extending some distance from the shore, the want of anchorage, and frequency of fogs, the Island is considered dangerous by mariners ; but " not in so great a degree as to render reasonable the dread with which it seems to have been occasionally regarded, and which can only have arisen from the natural tendency to magnify dangers of which we have no precise knowledge." *

Provision posts have been established by the Canadian Government, for the relief of crews wrecked on the Island, † and three

* Bayfield.

† To those who have drawn conclusions unfavorable to the island, from the number of wrecks which have been reported to have taken place upon it, it is necessary to point out that the wrecks, which in returns appear so formidable in the aggregate, under the head of " Anticosti," have not occurred at one spot, but at many spots widely separated, extending over a distance of 320 miles, that being the circumference of the island, and consequently the extent of coast front, not taking into account the indentations caused by bays, creeks, &c. Take the same length of coast upon any part of the main shores of the river or gulf, and it will be found, upon proper inquiry, that six times as many wrecks have occurred within it each year, as have for the same period taken place upon Anticosti. Instead of the wrecks upon the latter having been compared with the number of wrecks spread over the same extent of coast on the former, they have been generally regarded as having occurred at one spot, and have been compared with those only which have happened at some one place on the main shore of the river or gulf, of a few miles, or of less than a mile in extent, lying in the course of fewer vessels, yet wrecking annually nearly as many. From an estimate, made by the writer of this communication, of disasters in the River and Gulf of St. Lawrence, during the ten years ending November, 1849, it appears that half as many wrecks occurred upon the Manicouagan shoals, as took place upon the island in that period, and that Cape Rosier, Matane and Green Island each wrecked upwards of a third of the number of vessels which were stranded during the same period upon the whole of the 320 miles of the much labelled coasts of Anticosti. The Manicouagan shoals, Cape Rosier, Cape Chat, and other spots upon the main shores of the river and gulf, are places not only much more to be dreaded by the mariner than Anticosti, on account of the number of wrecks which occur upon them, but in consequence of the great loss of life which sometimes accompanies those wrecks, while, from the shelving nature of the beach at Anticosti, there are few instances recorded of wrecks upon the latter having been attended with loss of life. While the circumstantially related and carefully preserved account of the fate of the crew of the *Granicus*, wrecked in 1828, near Fox Bay (who, in the course of a long winter, died from famine), has created in the minds of many, who adopt without reflection any popular fallacy placed before them, a belief that every poverty of soil, every drawback of climate, and every danger of coast must belong to Anticosti, those greater dangers and those more numerous disasters upon the main shores of the St. Lawrence, attended with greater loss of life, have been almost entirely lost sight of, or if thought of in connection with the former, have been set down as unimportant, when compared with the unfairly estimated disasters and the imaginary dangers of Anticosti.

The evil reputation which still hangs over the island, became attached to it many years ago, before its coasts were thoroughly surveyed, when it was laid down in the chart as being many miles shorter than it actually is, in consequence of which many vessels ran upon it in places where deep water was supposed to exist, and before light-

light-houses are now maintained at the west, east and south-west points. Along the lowlands of the south coast, a continuous peat plain extends for upwards of eighty miles, with an average breadth of two miles, giving a superficies of 160 miles, with a thickness of peat, as observed on the coast of from three to ten feet. This extensive peat plain—probably the largest in Canada—is about fifteen feet above the ocean.*

An immense quantity of square timber and logs ready cut for the saw mill, are scattered over the south coast, having drifted down the rivers of the main land, and particularly the St. Lawrence. Some of the squared timber may have been derived from wrecks. Mr. Richardson, of the Geological Survey of Canada, who explored Anticosti in 1856, calculated that if the whole of the logs scattered along the south shore of the Island were placed end to end, they would reach one hundred and forty miles, and give about one million cubic feet of timber. Mr. Richardson concludes his report on this Island with the following paragraphs :

“ The strata of Anticosti being nearly horizontal, cannot fail to give to the surface of the country a shape in some degree conforming to them. The surface will be nearly a level plain, with only such modifications as are derived from the deeper wearing in a longitudinal direction of some of the softer beds, producing escarpments of no great elevation, with gentle slopes from their summits in a direction facing the sun, that will scarcely be perceptible to

houses were placed there, since the erection of which, and the late survey of its coasts, wrecks upon the island have become less frequent. Most of those which now occur there are caused by the neglect of using the lead in foggy weather, many of them through the incapacity or drunkenness of masters, who generally are shamefully underpaid, and some of them through design, for the purpose of cheating the underwriters. Of these latter cases the insurance offices are perfectly aware ; but, instead of endeavoring to meet them by preventive measures, they increase the rates of insurance so as to cover such losses, by estimating for them in a certain proportion to the whole ; thus making the entire trade pay for the dishonest acts of the rogue. This having the effect to increase the price of freight, by which the public are the sufferers, in having to pay a proportionably increased price for all articles imported, the Government should in future institute a strict inquiry into the loss of every ship in the river or gulf, by means of a naval police, and be empowered to inflict punishment where criminal design or even gross carelessness or drunkenness may be proved to have attended such loss. Those masters who desire to lose their ships, generally select Anticosti for the purpose, because they can always manage to run them ashore there without any danger to life, and without much risk of the circumstances attending the act being witnessed or understood by persons on shore ; and the provision posts being now well supplied, there is no danger, as there was formerly, of their suffering from the want of food. Thus many of the wrecks which take place there are produced in consequence of the ease with which a vessel may be beached, with safety to life, on many parts of the island, and not through its dangers of coast. In regard to the latter, those masters who know the coasts of the island well, generally make free with them (unless there happen to be a fog), in perfect confidence and safety, by which they gain headway much faster than by keeping in the centre of the channel, or along the south shore of the main land.—*Resources and Capabilities of the Island of Anticosti, by A. R. Roche, Esq.*

* Mr. Richardson ; Geological Survey of Canada.

the eye. The easily disintegrating character of the rocks forming the subsoil, can scarcely fail to have permitted a great admixture of their ruins with whatever drift may have been brought to constitute a soil ; and it is reasonable to suppose that the mineral character of these argillaceous limestones must have given to those ruins a fertile character. It is precisely on such rocks, in such a condition, and with such an attitude, that the best soils of the western peninsula of Canada West are placed, as well as of the Genesee country in the State of New York. I have seen nothing in the actual soil as it exists to induce me to suppose that in so far as soil is considered, Anticosti will be anything inferior to those regions ; and considerations of climate only can induce the opinion that it would in any way be inferior to them in agricultural capabilities.

" The three months that I was on the island were altogether too short a time to enable me to form any opinion upon the climate of Anticosti. But taking into view the known fact that large bodies of water are more difficult to cool and more difficult to heat than large surfaces of land, I should be inclined to suppose that Anticosti would not be so cold in winter nor so hot in summer as districts that are more inland and more south, and that it would not compare unfavorably with any part of the country between it and Quebec. While autumn frosts would take effect later at Anticosti, the spring would probably be a little later at Quebec.

" But such is the condition of the island at present, that not a yard of the soil has been turned up by a permanent settler ; and it is the case that about a million of acres of good land, at the very entrance from the ocean to the Province, are left to lie waste, while great expenses are incurred to carry settlers to the most distant parts of the west. Taken in connection with the fisheries, and the improvement of the navigation of the St. Lawrence, it appears to me that the establishment of an agricultural population in the island would not only be a profit to the settlers themselves, but a great advantage to the Province at large."

The scenery on Anticosti is tame, but there are parts of the coast where magnificent cliffs face the sea with towering fronts three or four hundred feet high. As no point of the interior is estimated to be more than 700 feet above the ocean, mountain scenery does not exist, but the headlands on the north coast are very picturesque ; and being composed of limestone,* they often

* Lower and middle silurian—Caradoc formation.

The Anticosti group, consisting of beds of passage from the lower to the upper silurian, and supposed to be synchronous with the Oneida conglomerate, the Medina sandstone, and the Clinton group of the New York survey, and with the Caradoc formation of England.—*Billings ; Geological Survey of Canada.*

present most imposing outlines. Fox Bay, near the east point, is the scene of the dreadful sufferings and melancholy fate of the crew and passengers of the ship *Granicus*, wrecked on the coast in November, 1828, before provision posts were established.

Anticosti, situated at the mouth of the River St. Lawrence, by its position commanding the Gulf, from its natural resources and the teeming life of the sea which surrounds it, capable of sustaining a large population, is of the utmost importance to Canada, and to Britain in relation to her North American dependencies. A well protected harbour and town at the west end, in Ellis Bay, would be invaluable with regard to the fisheries of the Gulf. The north point is only $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the western extremity of the Mingan Islands. A harbour of call and of refuge at Fox Bay, at the eastern extremity of the Island, would be of great advantage to the commerce of the Gulf, as well as to the fisheries. As a naval station, Ellis Bay would command both entrances to the river, and in fact control the entire Gulf. The corresponding station on the main land might be on the south, at Gaspé Bay, of which Admiral Bayfield says:—"The admirable Bay of Gaspé possesses advantages which may hereafter render it one of the most important places, in a maritime point of view, in these seas. It contains an excellent outer roadstead, off Douglas-town; a harbour at its head, capable of holding a numerous fleet in perfect safety; and a basin, where the largest ships might be hove down and refitted." If Gaspé Bay should be considered as too far out of the great line of communication by land between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Canada, the magnificent Bay of Chaleur offers every advantage which can be desired for a great inland terminus, open for the greater part of the year, and only 130 miles from Rivière du Loup, where the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada terminates. The Bay of Chaleur is 25 miles wide from Cape Despair to the celebrated Miscou Island, and 75 miles deep to the entrance of the magnificent River Ristigouche. Within this bay the climate is far superior to that of the adjacent gulf; fogs seldom enter it, and the navigation is by no means difficult.* The scenery on the Ristigouche is superb. On the north side of the valley, mountains rise to the height of 1,748 feet above the sea, at a distance of only two or three miles from the coast. On the southern or New Brunswick shore they reach nearly 1,000 feet. The mouth of the Ristigouche is destined to become of great importance, as it lies near to the coal fields of New Brunswick, and, when the Intercolonial Railroad is constructed, one point ought certainly to touch the head of the fine harbour of the Bay of Chaleur. If such a work could be

* Bayfield.

accomplished, it would ensure steam communication between Canada and Great Britain for nine months in the year at least, as there are many safe harbours and roadsteads in different parts of the bay, where the largest ships of the line may lie in safety, and even ascend up to the River Ristigouche, or nearly to Point Garde, with the assistance of buoys and a good pilot. *

Recent explorations establish the fact that there is a considerable quantity of good timber on Anticosti, fit for ship-building and exportation. Water power is abundant, and the timber could easily be manufactured on the spot. The manufacture of salt in the extensive lagoons on part of the south shore, might be very profitably carried on by following the method pursued in the south of France or in the northern part of Russia, where advantage is taken of the cold of winter to concentrate brine for summer evaporation. The want of salt at Anticosti and in the Gulf generally, has frequently been the cause of the loss of an immense quantity of fish. Salines could not only be very easily constructed, but the high price and constant demand for this article would ensure the sale of as much as could be manufactured. It would be a vast annual saving to the Province if the Canadian Government were to encourage by every means in their power the manufacture of salt from sea-water on Anticosti, where all the conditions are favorable, and where the demand for this necessary substance in the prosecution of the fisheries is so great. A new and most important industry would soon be created, and one mean of settling Anticosti with great advantage to the commercial interests of the country secured at the outset. The Americans, the French, the Spanish, in fact every European nation has its artificial Salines; Canada alone, with most favorable natural conditions for the manufacture of this article which costs us \$700,000 annually, has not yet given attention to this most valuable source of national wealth. The present lessee of the island has a few herds of Ayrshire cattle, which remain out feeding longer than would be safe in the neighborhood of Quebec, and in the spring they look in better condition than at any place on the St. Lawrence below Quebec. †

The economic materials known to exist in abundance on the island are limited, in the present state of our knowledge, to building stones of limestone and sandstone, grindstone, clay for bricks, fresh-water shell marl, peat, drift timber, and sea-weed in great abundance. The fisheries on the coast are the same as those of the gulf generally, and already engage a large fleet of American,

* Bayfield.

† Mr. Roche.

Nova Scotian, Jersey and Canadian vessels, and are quite sufficient to support a numerous population on the east and west extremities of the island, whose industry would furnish the fishermen with the supplies they most require, and which they are compelled to bring with them or seek in out-of-the-way ports when more are required.

The island of Anticosti originally formed a part of the country called Labrador. In 1825 it was re-annexed to Lower Canada by an act of the Imperial Parliament. The island was conceded in 1680 to the Sieur Jolliet ; it is now in the hands of a considerable number of persons, some residing in England and some in Canada. It ought to be purchased by the Canadian Government, and a colonization road cut out between Ellis Bay and Fox Bay. These harbors should be improved, and the sites of two towns laid out. If encouragement were given to settlers there can be no doubt that Anticosti would rapidly become a very important adjunct to the British Provinces, rivalling Prince Edward Island in importance. * And in the present aspect of events it is desirable that it should receive attention at an early day, and the fisheries of the Gulf secured to British subjects, and both preserved and encouraged by every means that can be suggested.

* Prince Edward Island lies wholly within the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In 1857 it had a population of 71,496 souls, a revenue of £32,348, and exported articles to the value of £134,465, its imports during the same period amounting to £258,728. The island is 123 miles long, 32 broad at its widest part and four at the isthmus where two deep bays nearly meet.